

William Rush #38
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Q: Mr. Rush, what was your normal duty aboard the *Phoenix*?

A: I was a radioman and I was striking to be a radioman. At that time I knew what the Morse Code was or who invented it from history in high school, but I didn't know that I was going to be using this stuff. I had no idea what the code was or what it was for. I did not know how to type, but they made a radioman out of me. Set me down, put a pair of earphones on me, said, "A E is a dit, a T is a dot. Now you pick them out." Well golly, it was I don't know how long before I could pick out the E's and T's. But after 19 months they made me a Radioman 3rd Class because I could pass 35 words a minute... typing and sending and receiving.

Q: Well that's quite an accomplishment. I understand not everyone made it through radio school.

A: That's right. I was one of them. Straight from boot camp.

Q: And when did you join the *Phoenix*?

A: The Phoenix? I got on the *Helena* [at] Norfolk to go around through the Canal to get on the *Phoenix* [in] dry dock [at] Vallejo. And in the Fall, and I don't remember what month, August, September, or October of '40, 1940, and she was settin' in dry dock and the first time I went aboard with the rest of the boot camp buddies, it was in my camp, S's, P's, and R's assigned to the USS *Phoenix*. And the Radio Officer come down and looked us over and he picked out who he wanted. He said, "Anybody know how to type?" Well I did take a typing course in high school just to see what a typewriter was all about, but not for any credit or anything. I didn't know how to type, but I thought I did. So I held up my hand and he said, "You're a radio striker." That how I got to be in the radio game. And of course you know, you've heard this many times I'm sure, all of us were known as "radio girls" because they would pass by and see us sitting down in a nice room with a chair, and typing you know, and nothing dirty or anything you know. They'd say "There are the radio girls." And the signalmen were skivvy wavers! Have you heard that before?

Q: No, first time.

A: Oh my goodness. I've got a "skivvy waver" here that's with me; a very dear friend of mine Jack Focal from Sherrill, New York.

Q: I've talked with him.

A Oh you have?

Q: I think.

A: Jack Focal from Sherrill, New York. He's the Chaplain of our Chapter in central New York, and we're that host Chapter for this convention today, and I'm the prerestoration chairman for this convention, and all the work that you've seen and the way of typing of programs or any brochures, name tags, or on the cube, or any kind of typing are because of my wife's taking her time after she comes home from work. We started in February of this year and we did not get behind. We kept up to date, and if Manney(??) hadn't have gone in the hospital to carry out his assigned duty, there would have been nothing to go wrong here. We did run into a few hitches because of his not being here.

Q: Well, it's a fine job that you've all done here. When you were on the *Phoenix* what was your battle station?

A: I was assigned to the antenna repair party. That was my general quarters assignment, to man the sound powered phones because I was a radio striker, passing the word from the Skipper on the bridge, the Senior Officer, the Skipper was not aboard, to the Executive Officer, but the Senior Executive Officer in the control room below decks, in case they were knocked out we could run the ship from down there. I was half way between them. I was on the 3rd deck below, laying flat on my stomach, passing these messages back and forth.

Q: What kind of messages were going back and forth?

A: "A fighter planes coming 2:00! Ten after two..." you know, whatever. That's the way they described them, "Coming in at 2:00, two planes... two torpedo planes!!" or whatever kind of planes. And, "They just dropped this bomb!" or "There are subs over here!" whatever... I didn't believe it! I didn't believe it. I wasn't scared. I was waiting to get ours. I was disappointed, really, that we didn't get one. But anyhow, that Saturday we had a white glove inspection. They couldn't find any dust anywhere on that ship. But while I was laying down there at my station, all of us were laying flat on our stomachs, they wouldn't let us stand up, they fired those guns on topside so fast and furious that a few rivets did pop out of the bulkheads and they was dust everywhere in there. They was dust everywhere. Where it came from I have no idea. About a two hours and there was a lull in the activity, I asked the Chief in charge of our antenna repair party if I could go and see for myself. He said, "Five minutes. I'll take the phones." I went up to the main deck to raise the hatch to come up. Our boatswain mate put his foot down on that hatch and said, "Close the goddamn hatch if you don't want your head blowed off. Get below!" I don't know which boatswain's mate that was. I have no idea.

Q: So, did you go back below then?

A: I went back, took over my position manning the sound powered phones. Then finally we were able to get past the flames of the

Arizona and that's when they made the picture... somebody made a picture of the *Phoenix* passing the *Arizona* with the flames and smoke in the background and the *Phoenix* is the mythical bird that can rise from the ashes, right?

Q: Right.

A: And that is a real good picture as if the *Phoenix* right there from the... and it is named after the capital city of Arizona.

Q: What was the hull number on the *Phoenix*?

A: The CL-46. That's it. And we went out to get the enemy, three major ships, the *St. Louis*, the *Detroit*, and the *Phoenix*, the three largest ships and I don't care what the *St. Louis* crew have said that they were the only ones to get out of there. They were not, cause when I was finally relieved to go to my duty station in the radio shack, approximately 12:30, I was going up to go up to the radio shack, the boatswain's mate said, "Hit the deck! Torpedoes! Starboard side!" The wakes were coming right at us. I laid down flat on my stomach waiting for the explosion. It didn't happen and I looked over there and I saw the two torpedoes one right after the other went underneath us, O.K.?

Now, while I was relaying all these messages, I do know they stripped ship right in the harbor because we were anchored. Normally, we are nested with the *Helena* and the *Honolulu* right in the middle. Had we been that way that day, they would have gone for us and we couldn't have fought back. We were accredited with shooting down nine planes. We were accredited with saving the *Whitney* and all those nest of destroyers, the *Phoenix*. She was able to get under way and maneuver because they did not come after us. They went after the 'big boys'. But the *Phoenix* was a big ship. I mean let's face it, 1,200 people lived aboard that ship. Now where was I... uh...

Q: Last time you were...

A: We tried. We tried to get out both sides of Ford Island, but we eventually got past the battleships burning and the oil without catching ourselves on fire. And when we got to the *Nevada* beached herself so she wouldn't bottleneck us coming out. They tried to do that. I looked ahead and as I was on my way up to the radio shack I saw the *St. Louis* full speed ahead of us and they was submarines right outside there that also fired the torpedoes at us. Then our ship was starting to throw depth charges over. I made it up to the radio room and then it began to get dark before I was relieved from my uh.... We had to set up emergency frequencies, right? We needed more operators. I was manning the weather frequency you know? Well, when we got ready to eat, I stayed up there quite a while and it was dark. They stripped ship though, I meant to tell you about this. They stripped the ship. They cut down the awnings. They through them overboard. They through over the paint pots. They dropped the Officer's mahogany gangplank right in the harbor... gangway.

Q: Well, that means they were serious.

A: That was serious. The Skipper had to come back on a motor launch and come up a Jacob's ladder to get aboard. Captain Fischer I believe was his name. And uh, the Executive Officer, there was quite a few of the Senior Officers ashore. Now when they sounded that GQ that morning, I was on the fantail with a radioman by the name of Gashay(??) a Cajun from Louisiana which I've tried to find in my cad(??). I don't know what's happened to him.

Q: Do you know how to spell his name?

A: G-A-U-T-H-I-E-R. I don't know what his first name is even. He's the one that started me smoking. I want to get back at him. Uh, he was a good buddy. We just finished eating our apple from breakfast and was standing there looking at the clear water on the fantail of the *Phoenix*. We threw our core into the water... BONG BONG BONG BONG (GQ) I said, "Oh my goodness, not on Sunday! We just came in from two weeks! Why on Sunday!" I was dressed to go to church service over on one of the battleships, the Protestant service. He was going to the Catholic you know. And we were waiting for the motor launch. And I just poked along to my battle station. But boy, by the time I got down there to man those phones, it was the real thing. It really was.

And as I say, the submarine that they did capture with the map, they got in there at five that morning and went around to all of our positions and the ink wasn't dry on it, you know. He was at up periscope at our tail end at 5:03 or something like that. He'd been to our.... he knew where we were. Now as I say, we passed the *Nevada*, beached. One of the cruisers went that way, we went this way, and they went that way. That's when the rumors started. Darken ship. They wouldn't let anybody light up a cigarette. We hadn't eaten all day. They lined us up. Told us to get in line, come down to the mess hall, get a.... You want me to tell you what it was?

Q: What's that?

A: The sandwich we called it?

Q: Sure.

A: Horse-cock and onion (baloney and onion sandwich)(laughter)... and a cup of coffee. That was soooo good. So good. That was really good. But anyhow, while we was standing in the line, where this scuttlebutt started and how it started beats the hell out of me, but we got word that they were landing on Bellows Field, they were landing at Barbers Point, and I thought, my God, we're right here; we're by ourselves... all by ourselves; a sitting duck, you know? But for somehow we couldn't find anything out there, except those submarines that we tried to depth charge, and we did sink one of the subs.

Now we were out for three days. We'd just come in. We were low on provisions and food. We had to come back in that next

Wednesday after we couldn't find anybody, to provision up. And as soon as... I went on the signal deck to look over at Aiea. I saw the motor launches scouring and dragging the Harbor, dead bodies, whatever you know. And I saw wooden box after wooden box stacked up at Aiea with dead bodies or parts of bodies in them, from the signal bridge in a telescope. That was sickening, the smell of the burning the oil, the burnt and the flesh, the dead flesh, was really pungent, really.... really. I remember that right now, how it smelled.

We got under way as soon as we were provisioned. They ordered us back to San Francisco. We were very fast cruisers, one of the fastest, 35 knots; full speed to San Francisco because they fired one of the 5-inch turret guns so fast and furious that when it cooled (it got red hot), cooled off it cracked.

Well before.... I'm getting ahead of myself. We were ordered back to escort another hospital ship out there loaded down with medical supplies. We made it there in four days and we came back, and we were there. They would not let us talk to anybody that came aboard the *Phoenix*, while the dock workers came on and replaced that gun barrel. We were not allowed to speak to any of the dock hands. They did not want us to tell what had happened over there.

I wrote my mother a letter because they had me reported as killed in the battle, because Commander Samuel Johnson who was the doctor on the *Arizona* was killed. He was from my hometown and the fellow that joined from high school with me named Smith and went through basic training with me also was on the *Phoenix*, and there was a guy named Clifford Smith on the *Arizona* who was killed. There was a P.R. Rush on the *Arizona* who is still on the *Arizona* and those names are out there. And because they associated those names with the Commander Samuel Johnson and the similarity in names, they had all three of us from that county as casualties. My mother wouldn't believe it, two weeks when she got my letter, there was everything cut out except, "I still have my appetite. Love, Son" She knew then I was alive. But for two weeks it was reported on account of the paper that we three were casualties, only Samuel Johnson, and he's still on the *Arizona*. Well, then when we brought the hospital ship over here that Christmas Day, we were there two days. They let us, half of us went over to Waikiki to have Christmas dinner.

Then two days later we had orders back to San Francisco. We made it full speed. Well, the next morning after we docked and provisioned up and everything, nobody went ashore, when we woke up we were going under the Golden Gate Bridge with this [SS] *Queen Mary* and a bunch of the Matson Liners and all small craft. We were to escort *Queen Mary*. The *Queen Mary* had a full Division on her going, we did not know where, but we figured it out after a while, the people... the enlisted personnel charting the course finally figured out we were headed toward Australia, Melbourne. But we had to turn the loose, I believe it was the [President] *Coolidge*, and she was to land at one of the Islands, and they hit a mine and it turned over and the soldiers climbed off and waded ashore.

But we went into Melbourne and they was so glad to see us down there. they came down out of the hills and everything

here's the *Queen Mary*! It's too big. They had to send out ferries to bring in the soldiers the next day, because she was so big. The *Queen Mary*... MacArthurs Division or whatever.

But anyhow, we made hay there with the girls naturally before the soldiers got there. But we were there and then they dispatched us over to Perth, Fremantle, and then we were to take these thirteen coal stoking ships, escort them to Ceylon which is Sri Lanka now, loaded with Australians going to help out in the Middle East War. But before we got there, we got a message to go to relieve the *Houston* which was in trouble coming out of Manila. Well, before we could get anywhere near the *Houston*, they told us she was lost; to head for Broom, Australia. Well before we got there, we got a message they bombed Broom and were after us. They were all kind of small craft there and your old "S" submarines coming out of the Philippines right down there, and we did not know what kind of ship was what, or who they belonged to. And the *Phoenix* put our two planes up, and they went over and they dropped some bombs. And I don't know whether we sunk any of our old "S" U-Boats or not, but we tried because we didn't know who they were. MacArthur's crew, you know escaping Corregidor where ever they was coming from. Well, then they ordered us back to Fremantle. But by the time we got down there, that's where we met all this conglomeration of ships trying to converge on Fremantle too. We provisioned up and then they ordered us out with the first aircraft carrier, *Langley* loaded with P-38's, going to the Middle East War. We took her and a tanker loaded with oil, the *Pecos*, was headed again for Sri Lanka, Ceylon at that time, India, Bombay I think. But for some reason they had us to go to the evacuation of Java, to aid in that, the *Phoenix*. The *Pecos*... the *Langley* was sunk, the *Pecos* picked up some of the survivors off of the *Langley*. It was torpedoed and sunk. They dispatched to that position in the Indian Ocean to try to find any survivors from both the ships. Well, all we could find was an oil slick; no survivors off of the *Pecos* or the *Langley*. Our first aircraft carrier. It was a converted one you know. Everybody came down to the docks there to see an aircraft carrier. Of course you couldn't take off or land on it. It was just loaded with planes. Now, do you want me to go on from there?

Q: Yeah, it's interesting.

A: Well, we did what we could do. They called us "the galloping ghost of the Great Barrier Reef"... the *Phoenix*(laughter) because we operated with the Dutch Admiral who was in charge at that time down in that part of the world, which operated with the Australian cruisers and Dutch cruisers, and up and down Sidney. And we went into Sidney to get the mail for the Fleet. The entire Fleet was around Guadalcanal at that time. They dispatched us up with a load of mail to deliver the mail to the ships. When we were approaching, or getting in sight of the *Saratoga* to give them the mail, they got two torpedo hits, and the smoke went up, but they were not sunk, thank goodness. So I was in the battle of Guadalcanal on the *Phoenix*.

In April of '43, we pulled into Fremantle and uh... I mean not Fremantle, I'm sorry, it was uh... we pulled into Brisbane(?). I was so efficient a radio operator, they thought I had belonged over on General MacArthurs staff. He was sitting up there in a hotel in Brisbane, his headquarters. And I begged and pleaded with the radio officer... I was homesick. I had never been away from home for that long a time that I said to wait for new construction to come through and let me go back to the States so I could go home. He said, "O.K. Rush, if you don't want to, O.K." I'll be darn. We went right from there up to Townsville. I got my orders for new construction (laughter). He said, "You're going FFT [*For further transfer*]." Do you know what that means?

Q: No.

A: You're hitch hiking. You're on your own. Report to the receiving stations you know. I caught the train. I stayed with the Army in tents that night after they put me ashore off of the *Phoenix*. I slept with the Army in a tent. I was put on a train in a white uniform with my bag and baggage; everything I owned, and I rode that blame train down to Brisbane, and I, I mean I saw the kangaroos. That was wilderness. And they had no screens on those trains and the cinders... my white uniform looked like it was black by the time I got down to Brisbane. I only stayed there a couple of days until they put me on the [USS] *Thomas Jefferson* for New Caledonia, for further transfer.

I got on the blame [USAT] *Sea Witch*, an army transport filled with diseased and wounded soldiers to come back to San Francisco. And it was so crowded, and so messed up, you couldn't take a shower or anything; I got the scabies. When I got to San Francisco, they put me in quarantine for 3 days in sulphur and then they turned me loose for a 15 day leave to go over to Alabama on the train.

I had to stand up, the trains were so crowded. And I'll be blamed, when I got back to Tacoma, 15 days later, I was assigned to the [USS] *Mission Bay* to commission it; a plank owner. They had already... I was assigned to the [USS] *Liscome Bay*. They had already sent it out. The crew got there; a bigger crew, and they assigned it, and assigned us to the *Mission Bay*. I'm sorry, they assigned us to the [USS] *Baffins* and we took it up to Vancouver and gave it to the British, and then came back, and I went on the *Mission Bay*. But before I did that, as soon as I come back off that first fifteen day leave, I turned right around and they said go back for another fifteen days. I turned right around and did the same thing again. I was stupid, because standing in front of the train from Tacoma to Birmingham is no fun. I had no where to sleep, nowhere to sit, and I asked everywhere, bathrooms, where ever I could.

O.K., then, but the *Liscome Bay* went out on trial run; that was the first one I was assigned to and on the trial run it caught fire and 80% of the crew was burnt up on that *Liscome Bay*, my first assignment. The good Lord has been with me ever since. And uh, on the *Mission Bay* now we left there and they brought us around to the Atlantic Ocean. We had a squadron of pilots aboard. You know, those baby flat tops weren't very long to land

on and take off on either. And they assigned us to ASWDVELANT which was Antisubmarine Development Detachment Atlantic, stationed at Quonset Port, Rhode Island, and I was on flight pay because they wanted me to fly. I couldn't. I was too fast to stay at the base radio. I was in charge of that. Those pilots were not as fast as I could... They couldn't keep up with me and I couldn't slow down for them at that time. So they said, "Get rush off of that circuit, I don't know what he's saying! Slow down!" I couldn't slow down. I don't know because I was just too fast for them. But anyhow, then they made me go up and copy the damn stuff and put me on flight pay. But anyhow, one time, we pulled into the Azores and right alongside us came a German U-Boat to provision up also. They were neutral, right? Nothing could happen to us as long as we were there (laughter). That was the oddest damn thing, but...

Q: How far away were they from your ship?

A: They were docked right in the harbor with us, provisioning the same as we were. Then we had been out there looking for them at sea and they were looking for us, to sink us. As I say, that was our job. Well a year on that ship if you wasn't on duty, you had nowhere whatsoever to go because they wouldn't let you in your quarters unless you were going to bed and they had no kind of recreational rooms or anything. They wouldn't let you on the flight deck. They wouldn't let you in the radio shack because you was off duty. They wouldn't let you in the flight deck because they was flying them on and off and we just walked around like a chicken with a head cut off.

After a year of that I said, "I'm going to put in for shore duty." I did and they sent me to Quonset Point and I got homesick for my buddies at sea and I said, "I can't take this either. I want to go back to the cruiser. They sent me on the USS *Missouri*. Now there's a story behind this that you may not have heard, or nobody else for that comparing. Captain R.L. Hillenkoetter our first CIA director was the senior surviving officer off the West Virginia on December the 7th, '41. He was a Lt. Comm. I think at that time. He was the Skipper of USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay with the other two battleships, *Iowa* and *New Jersey*. Capt. Hillenkoetter on the *Missouri* brought the old *West Virginia* along with him for the signing of the surrender because they were sunk there in Pearl Harbor and he wanted to show them that they did not sink his old battleship, got it?

Q: Right.

A: Now, I went aboard in Guantanamo Bay after the signing of the surrender and for three days I left Norfolk on a subchaser. I had never ridden on anything smaller than a cruiser. For three days I could not get out of my bunk. I was so sea sick, I couldn't stand the smell of food and I was right next to the galley. And when I reported aboard on Valentines day of 1946, they had to gather enough crew to make a goodwill cruise to the Middle East to take the Turkish Ambassadors body back on the *Missouri*; the one that died here during the War, and they wanted

him returned to Istanbul. While we did that, we gathered a bunch of ships and borrowed radiomen from all directions to make this cruise. I was the Senior Radioman aboard and I had to put out the press and everything. I was also an honorary pallbearer for this... whatever his name was. I couldn't pronounce it then; I can't now. A Turkish gun. Well, one of the fellows that later worked with me at (??), I was his supervisor at Cornell, from Istanbul. He said, "Bill, I remember your coming in at Istanbul. I was nine years old. You made such big waves and did such damage to the small craft there. I'll never forget that day. You were aboard?" I said, "I sure was." Well when I left that Library, he made a model of the *Missouri* and in semaphore the flags on it, he put W.P.Rush, and I'll treasure that always. I made his picture and put it right by it and put it on a special shelf. I've got a military wall at my home in Ithaca but I don't know what I will do with all the stuff I have accumulated. I have a ten room house there in Ithaca the children call their home. They don't want me to sell it. They've moved on. My third daughter is an associate professor of law at DuPaul University at this time and she's only been there two years. She worked (unclear??) for two years number on Wall Street. She graduated Cum Lade and a Cornell graduate I believe. She doesn't know what it is to want for anything right now, you know what I mean. So I like to brag on my children as everybody does I guess. We did a good job getting them all advanced degrees, except the youngest one. She says, "College is not for me. I want to get on the telephone as a line person. Till this day she has her own bucket truck with Bell Telephone Company in Tacoma Park, Maryland, Prince George County, and she is a very good Cable splicer I understand. She's making quite a bit of money.

Q: Sure. It's a good paying job.

A: So ah, that.....
(tape ends)